



U.S. Department of Justice

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NEWS RELEASE

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Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, announced that physician Russell A. Johnson and pharmacist Daniel M. Varalli pleaded guilty today to charges relating to the illegal sale of controlled substances and other prescription drugs over the Internet to consumers through various websites. Johnson and Varalli pleaded guilty to conspiring to unlawfully distribute and dispense Schedule III and IV controlled substances other than for a legitimate medical purpose and not in the usual course of professional practice. They each face five years imprisonment.

Both Johnson and Varalli pleaded guilty to the lead conspiracy count in a 108-count indictment returned by a grand jury in this District against Vincent K. Chhabra, Johnson, Varalli, seven other individuals, and three companies. In return for their guilty pleas, the United States moved to dismiss the other counts against Johnson and Varalli. These pleas bring to five the number convicted of drug conspiracy charges arising from the illegal sale of controlled substances through the Internet. Physicians Marvin J. Brown and Lawrence L. Cockerille, Jr., and pharmacist Luke J. Coukos have each pleaded guilty to related conspiracy charges.

The indictment alleges that Chhabra and his co-conspirators used an "online ordering process" to allow customers to order controlled substances and other prescription drugs over the Internet, through such websites as "www.get-it-on.com." When customers ordered drugs online, the indictment charges, the customers chose the type, quantity, and dose of controlled substances they wanted, and answered some questions on an order form. However, no one checked the accuracy of the information that customers provided, as the Controlled Substances Act requires; and customers obtained the drugs without ever meeting a doctor face-to-face, as required by law.

Mr. McNulty stated: "Illegal sale of drugs on the Internet is an emerging and dangerous threat to public health. We are responding aggressively to this threat and will not allow the promise of the Internet to be corrupted by drug traffickers."

Also making this announcement is Peter D. Keisler, Assistant Attorney General, Civil Division, U.S. Department of Justice.

This case is being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Food and Drug Administration's Office of Criminal Investigations, and the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Assistant United States Attorneys James P. Gillis and Karen L. Taylor, and Department of Justice, Office of Consumer Litigation, Attorneys Linda I. Marks and Jill P. Furman are handling the case for the United States.

It should be remembered that an Indictment is not evidence of criminal activity, and all defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven otherwise.

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